UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/53/97
16 April 1998
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH/FRENCH

Fifty-third session
Items 37 and 103 of the preliminary list*

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOME OF THE WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE WORLD SOCIAL SITUATION AND TO YOUTH, AGEING, DISABLED PERSONS AND THE FAMILY

Letter dated 14 April 1998 from the Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith the proceedings of the presentation to Canada of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt International Disability Award at the United Nations on Monday, 2 March 1998. The Prime Minister of Canada, the Right Honourable Jean Chrétien, accepted the award on behalf of the people of Canada. The Prime Minister was accompanied on this occasion by a delegation representing Canadian non-governmental organizations dealing with disability issues.

The Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute and the World Committee on Disability selected Canada as the recipient of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt International Disability Award for 1997, in recognition of "Canada's historic and continuing commitment to give meaning to the United Nations World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, which the General Assembly adopted in 1982". The presentation ceremony took place in the Economic and Social Council Chamber, and was well attended by delegations, Secretariat staff, non-governmental organizations and representatives of the media.

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I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and the attached proceedings* circulated as a document of the General Assembly under items 37 and 103 of the preliminary list.

(Signed) Robert R. FOWLER
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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* The attached proceedings are being circulated in the language of submission only.

PRESENTATION OF THE FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT INTERNATIONAL DISABILITY AWARD TO CANADA

ACCEPTANCE BY THE RIGHT HONOURABLE JEAN CHRÉTIEN PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA

PROCEEDINGS

Presiding
Ambassador William J. vanden Heuvel
President, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute

Remarks
Alan A. Reich
Chairman, World Committee on Disability

Presentation
Christopher duPont Roosevelt
Grandson of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt

Acceptance
The Right Honourable Jean Chrétien
Prime Minister of Canada

Comments
Kent Hehr
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Closing
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Deputy Secretary-General
United Nations

UNITED NATIONS
MARCH 2, 1998

Presiding
Ambassador William J. vanden Heuvel
President, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute

Your Excellency, Prime Minister Chrétien, the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Madam Chrétien, Distinguished Ambassadors and Representatives to the United Nations and Distinguished Guests:

We convene today to honour the leadership of a great nation, in assisting its disabled citizens in the fulfilment of their hopes and dreams and their talents. We welcome that nation's Prime Minister, Jean Chrétien, who will receive the Franklin Delano Roosevelt International Disability Award today on behalf of the people of Canada. We salute Canada's historic and continuing commitment to give meaning to the United Nations World Programme of Action concerning disabled persons which the General Assembly adopted in 1982.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the 32nd President of the United States, was the only person in recorded history of mankind to have been chosen as the elected leader of his people, even though he could not walk or stand without help. The award given in his name today recalls the courage and the strength which made his remarkable career possible. He understood the aspirations of the disabled because they were his own. He set in motion the forces in both the private and public sectors that changed society's attitude toward the disabled. Historians agree that if any single person can be so designated, President Roosevelt was the founding father of the United Nations. It is therefore supremely appropriate that this award, designed to encourage a major program of the United Nations, should be given in this forum to Canada, whose extraordinary leadership and support of the United Nations in this, and in so many other areas, is and should be an inspiration to all of the member states of the United Nations, the organization which embodies mankind's hope for world peace, for security and for social justice.

Remarks
Alan A. Reich
Chairman, World Committee on Disability

Disability is running rampant on our planet. A half billion men, women and children, 500 million people, are unable to participate fully in daily life because of physical or mental disability. 80 per cent of these most vulnerable persons live in the developing world and thus are doubly disadvantaged by disability and poverty.

Counting our family members who also cope with disability on a daily basis, we comprise a fifth of the world's population. The numbers are increasing dramatically and only -- not only from population growth and medical advances that preserve and prolong life, but from wars, land mines, accidents, violence, malnutrition, birth defects, substance abuse and environmental damage.

Disability knows no political boundaries; anyone can join the disability community in an instant. No one is immune. Prejudice and ignorance doom many of the world's disabled to a life of hopelessness. Disabled persons and especially women in most of the world are discriminated against. Many are removed from society. For many, disability is death denied. Disability is a silent emergency on our planet.

Fortunately, the United Nations has responded. The UN General Assembly in a session I was privileged to address on December 3rd, 1982 adopted unanimously the UN World Programme of Action concerning disabled persons. It is a beacon of hope. It calls on all nations to act. Canada has led the way and is a shining example for all nations.

On behalf of the world's disability community, a half billion strong, I congratulate you, Mr. Prime Minister, and Canada, on receiving the 1997 Franklin Delano Roosevelt International Disability Award. Your nation's progress in improving the lives of persons with disabilities will inspire worldwide action to achieve the goal of the UN World Programme. The goal is the full and equal participation of persons with disabilities in the life of their respective societies.

I know President Roosevelt, a world's statesman with a disability who led his nation for 12 years while using a wheelchair every day, and a founder of the United Nations, would be extremely proud today of you and Canada, a country he loved and visited often.

I thank you for your personal leadership, Mr. Secretary-General, and Madam Secretary-General, and all those in this marvellous institution who have laboured so hard to bring about this elevation of the FDR award to a place of prominence in the world, and I call on you to urge all nations to follow vigorously Canada's example in fulfilling the UN World Programme of Action concerning disabled persons. All humanity stands to gain.

Presentation
Christopher duPont Roosevelt
Grandson of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt

If Franklin Roosevelt were here today he certainly would be enjoying himself, but he would be standing leg braces locked, gripping the podium fiercely with one hand while with his other he crushed the biceps of one of his sons. He would be in pain. It would have been for most of us, and is for some of us, unbearable. He would be disregarding the weight and chafing persistent sores of steel braces. But most certainly he would have been defiant in his focused insistence that he appear to walk, to greet us all in what Hugh Galliger has coined "the splendid deception."

It was largely unrecognized by most Americans back then, but today it is undeniable that FDR lived with a serious disabling paralysis that resulted from his having contracted polio at the age of 39. But from those closest to FDR in those times to today's award winning historians and researchers, we have learned that the experience of polio and his learning to live with constant pain and disability most likely gave him much of the strength, courage and determination that made him the great president and world leader he was.

One cannot comprehend, much less understand FDR, without learning of the events and experiences that helped to shape his character, including his struggle with polio. But he was not great despite his disability; he was great because of his disability. I would urge us all to think in terms of FDR's disability as enabling him, not disabling him.

In his day, FDR was perhaps the keenest observer of the political moment, of the importance of attitude and impression and of the imagery needed to raise the confidence and spirits of a beleaguered nation and a war-torn world. And many have since concluded that behind the incredible and irresistible confidence and the infectious spirit was this keen sense of what image he had to present to most of the world as the fully capable leader, the happy warrior, the confident Commander-in-Chief, the ever-buoyant politician, and who could deny he was not all of these with his disability.

In this new day and age before this very special gathering, and for this specific occasion, I am not so sure that FDR would not have used his wheelchair or possibly just his braces and crutches. He would have recognized our acceptance of the truth, that all of us are imperfect in one way or another, as well as the harsher reality that some of us are more seriously disabled than others but by no means less able, less inspiring or less determined. He would have understood the differences of this age and the continuing critical need to have role models to inspire both the ordinarily disabled and the extraordinary disabled to attain the heights that can be achieved with courage and determination. The attitudes of today are not those of yesterday. We have come a long way from the days disabilities were kept secret and hidden, but we have not come far enough, no

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where near far enough, and that's why such major initiatives as the United Nations World Programme of Action concerning disabled persons and the many other national initiatives adopted and implemented in countries across the world are terribly important.

It is why we are all here, to use the important message of a prestigious award, the Franklin Delano Roosevelt disability award, to a clearly deserving country, Canada, coupled with a well publicized event engaging distinguished world leaders to bring public attention and recognition to the issue of how nations, communities, organizations, religions and people of good will everywhere can and must expand the participation of people with disabilities for economic, humanitarian and social reasons.

It is most appropriate that Canada is this year's recipient of an award with the name of Franklin D. Roosevelt attached to it for in many ways FDR had a very special relationship with Canada. He first went to the Island of Campobello in the Province of New Brunswick with his family in 1884 and repeatedly returned during ensuing summers. One of his children was born in the cottage on the Island of Campobello and it was also at the Island of Campobello that FDR came down with polio. And after his struggle with polio, gaining the New York governorship and becoming elected President, he kept returning to his beloved island. It was FDR's beloved Island of Campobello that drew him back so often to Canada to nourish his soul, replenish his energy, savour its quiet beauty, sail its waters and enjoy his wise and respectful neighbours. It was either with Canadians or on Canadian soil or in Canadian waters that important elements of the Canadian, British and United States strategy for the Second World War were developed. From the unusual Boxcar Summit FDR held with Prime Minister MacKenzie King, to the Atlantic Conference in Newfoundland and the two Quebec conferences in 1943 and 1944, FDR pursued a close and mutually respectful good neighbour policy with his important ally and good neighbour, Canada.

Constitutionally, through legislation, government funding and a national strategy committed to action that has improved access to housing, employment, transportation, education and communications, Canada has provided an inspired leadership in guaranteeing and furthering the rights of people with disabilities.

Today it is a special privilege as a Roosevelt, as a citizen of Canada's good neighbour, the United States, and as one personally dedicated to the rights and prerogatives of the disabled to be able to share in their ceremony presenting the Franklin Delano Roosevelt International Disability Award to Canada.

It is only with continuing such efforts and recognizing such achievements that we can enable the spirit. I salute Canada and the progress it has made for people with disabilities, the leadership of Prime Minister Chrétien and the honour they have achieved today.

Acceptance
The Right Honourable Jean Chrétien
Prime Minister of Canada

I am very honoured to accept the Franklin Delano Roosevelt International Disability Award on behalf of Canada.

I do receive this award in all humility. This award is not about our government or any government for that matter. It is about people and a fundamental commitment to equality. This commitment underpins the work of REACH, the sponsor of Canada's nomination for this award, and I would like to salute Dr. Bruce Mills, the chairperson, and the honourary chairman, the Honourable Ray Hnatyshyn.

The best way I know to explain the Canadian experience on disability issues is to start with the delegation here from Canada. Seated in the audience are 13 truly extraordinary people. But they are not our guests, they are our government's partners and we are all but a small cross-section of a nation-wide Canadian partnership, a partnership of voluntary organizations, of businesses and of governments. But, at heart, a partnership of people. People dedicated to a simple proposition that persons with disabilities have the right, the right to enjoy and have access to any opportunity that life has to offer.

Indeed, we believe it is a basic right of citizenship. Canada enjoys many blessings as a nation. We are rich in resources, both natural and human. A critical goal in Canada is ensuring that all Canadians get to share in what Canada has to offer and that they can contribute to making Canada even stronger.

We believe that we simply cannot afford to exclude Canadians with disabilities from our social and economic development. We will shortchange them and just as important, we will shortchange our society and its future economic prosperity and quality of life.

Inclusion is important to our Charter of Rights and Freedoms which I had the honour to help draft and implement as Minister of Justice in 1982. Section 15 is a constitutional prohibition of discrimination on the basis of mental and physical disability. It also specifically permits affirmative action programs to help Canadians with disabilities, something our country is especially proud of.

In 1985, the Canadian Human Rights Act was amended to broaden the prohibition. And there is new legislation before our Parliament that broadens the concept of inclusion even further. From these legal landmarks flow a host of initiatives designed to meet the challenges of broadening the participation of Canadians with disabilities in our national life.

The challenge of access, the challenge of mobility, and above all, the challenge of attitude, we seek to practice this ethic at home and abroad and here at the UN, and in following up on the global land mine convention to ensure that land mine victims can return to meaningful productive lives.

As I said I am part of a national partnership. Canadians will simply not passively accept policies. They take their rightful place in creating and drafting policy.

The first mandate of our government, we struck a Task Force on Disability Issues. It was made up of parliamentary members and guided by the disability community. It made important recommendations that are already taking effect. Our 1997 Budget contained innovative new tax measures. It created a new Opportunities Fund which will help Canadians with disabilities find and keep jobs. And our 1998 budget took additional steps.

Ladies and gentlemen, I don't want you to get the impression that our partnership is free of disagreement. In any good partnership, there is always a diversity of views. And believe me, the disability community in Canada has not been shy about letting our government know when it is not happy with what we are doing. But our disagreements have been about means, not needs. Not hands. And about the pace of change, about the availability of resources and all Canadians have made sacrifices to restore the fiscal health of our nation and today I want to say to my partners here in this room and beyond, that as Canada begins moving into a post-deficit era, as we make strategic investment that has an opportunity for all, Canadians with disabilities will be included.

As I accept this award on behalf of Canada, I realize that it is an opportunity to look in two directions. As we look to the past, we can savour the many achievements we have made as a nation to enable Canadians with disabilities to play a fuller role in our society.

As we look to the future, it is with the knowledge that the full inclusion of Canadians with disabilities is a work in progress, a work that we must have the will to complete.

And at this time I am pleased to announce that a national association of disabled students has been chosen to receive the $50,000 FDR cash award.

NEADS is run by and for Canadian post-secondary students with disabilities. It is about ensuring access to opportunity. This money will help young graduates make the transition from school to work and to realize their full potential.

Canada is very proud to receive the FDR award. It says a lot about our accomplishment, about our values, about the strength of our partnership and about Canada.

Comments
Kent Hehr
National Educational Association of Disabled Students

On behalf of the National Educational Association of Disabled Students, I want to thank you very much for selecting NEADS as a recipient of these funds. I also wanted to thank the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute for initiating this award. I want you all to know we will put this money to effective use.

In today's knowledge-based economy, all of us need the education to make the most of its opportunities. That is equally true for young people with disabilities. Since 1986, NEADS has been active in working to make campuses more accessible and accommodating. But that is only the start. No one stays on campus forever. People with disabilities look forward to careers like all other students, and like our classmates we often need the work experience that opens doors to those careers. By funding our mentorship program this award will help us build bridges to work for more students with disabilities. It will ensure that more of these students can get the exposure to the workplace that will help them build networks and careers.

This award shows a good beginning for Canada. We need to continue our work to ensure full citizenship and full participation of disabled people in all aspects of Canadian life. We will need your help, Mr. Prime Minister, and everyone's help in this room to take this further. Thank you very much for this honour and for all of your continued support.

Closing
Madam Louise Fréchette
Deputy Secretary-General
United Nations

You can well imagine that it is with very special pleasure that I join all of you in paying tribute to Canada and its pioneering work to make the rights of disabled persons recognized so that disabled persons can participate fully and on equal footing in the life of society in all its aspects.

Canada has shown everything that can be accomplished. By giving the rights and the quality of life of disabled persons priority standing, the Canadian Government has prepared a strategy which is as ambitious as it is energetic to finance hundreds of programs in the field of housing, transport, education and employment; for its part Parliament has adopted a range of laws that will modify the present tax system. Many non-governmental organizations, associations of students and other representatives of civil society continue to participate actively in the promotion of the rights of the disabled.

And on the global scene, Canada has displayed the same determination and equal imagination. As you are aware, Canada has been among the most strong promoters of the campaign to prohibit anti-personal land mines, those causers of death and disablement that has made terror in many countries.

It is right that the Roosevelt Institute has chosen Canada for not only what it has accomplished within its borders, but also for the active role it is playing on the international scene.

Ladies and gentlemen, you might be surprised to know that more than 500 million men, women and children, nearly one in ten people on earth, suffer from some mental, physical or other disability. People with disabilities face discrimination. Their families suffer along with them. They tend to be found among the poorest strata of society. This is in many respects a silent crisis, but Canada has been making noise to great effect. And the United Nations has also been part of the noise, part of this cause.

Since its founding, the United Nations has been at the centre of global efforts to promote the well being and rights of people with disabilities. The Charter and Universal Declaration of Human Rights stress the dignity and worth of every human person and the equal rights of men and women. The World Programme of Action concerning disabled persons adopted by the General Assembly represents a political and moral commitment by member states to enhance disability prevention, to improve services and to fight against prejudice.

Friends, the world is not that large. We can learn from the courage displayed by people with disabilities in overcoming the obstacles they face. We can all benefit from the contributions made by people with disabilities, for they possess an enormous amount of talent and energy that must be tapped. So let us salute the Roosevelt Institute for making this award possible. Let us pay tribute to this year's winner, Canada, and to the personal commitment of its Prime Minister, Jean Chrétien, and let us renew our pledge to do our utmost to build a world in which every citizen can participate fully and actively.